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Advisory Mechanisms to Support Global Policymaking

Science and technology, as part of their contribution to economic and social development, must be applied to the identification, avoidance and control of environmental risks and the solution of environmental problems and for the common good of mankind.

Stockholm Declaration 1972, Principle 18[1]

We must … base our analysis in credible data and evidence, enhancing data capacity, availability, disaggregation, literacy and sharing.

UN 2014[2]

On an institutional level, a global entity with a strong scientific advisory capacity is needed to streamline reporting and decision-making processes, including the voices of non-state actors. It must coherently link environmental issues to social and economic priorities, for none of these can advance in isolation.

Bahá'í International Community, 2008[3]

The legislative function in the reformed United Nations, whether solely in the General Assembly or also with a World Parliamentary Assembly (WPA), will need a number of supporting advisory mechanisms if it is to exercise its broad responsibilities effectively in the global interest (e.g., for specialized scientific, technical, and other expertise). A strong civil society voice including nongovernmental

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[1] United Nations. 1972. *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment*, held at Stockholm, June 5–16, 1972. A/CONF.48/14. New York, United Nations. Stockholm Declaration, Principle 18.

[2] United Nations. 2014. *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*, Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda. Document A/69/700, December 4, 2014. New York, United Nations. www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/700&Lang=E.

[3] Bahá'í International Community. 2008. *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One*. http://bic.org/statements-and-reports/bic-statements/08-0214.htm.

organizations (NGOs) has been shown to contribute constructively to global policy-making. A broad scientific advisory process is also needed to provide authoritative reports on the state of the planet and to prepare reports on emerging or problematic technologies that may require global legislative action. An Office of Ethical Assessment could alert legislators to the ethical implications of issues under consideration.

A CHAMBER OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Richard Falk and Andrew Strauss published an insightful article titled "Toward World Parliament" in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in which they made the case for the creation of a second chamber, deriving its authority directly from organized global citizenry, within the UN and supporting the UN General Assembly.[4] The post–Cold War period has witnessed what Jessica Mathews called "a novel redistribution of power among states, markets, and civil society. National governments are not simply losing autonomy in a globalized economy. They are sharing powers – including political, social, and security roles at the core of sovereignty – with businesses, with international organizations, and with a multitude of citizens groups, known as NGOs."[5] The Commission on Global Governance, co-Chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Nigerian Foreign Minister and UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Ibrahim Gambari, also called for the facilitation of practical contributions by elements of civil society within a reformed UN system.[6] The proposal for a Civil Society Chamber or permanent Forum would formalize the May 2000 UN Millennium NGO Forum where Secretary General Kofi Annan invited 1,350 individuals representing a broad spectrum of civil society organizations to consult on critical global problems and to present recommendations to the Millennium Summit of Heads of State, the largest such gathering ever.

The members of this Chamber would not represent their respective states but would rather serve as advocates of particular issues of global concern that transcend national borders, from the environment and management of the global commons, to human rights, to world peace and security, gender equality, and the global fight against corruption, to name only a few. NGOs could be accredited for membership using an enhanced version of current UN accreditation procedures under

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[4] Falk, Richard and Andrew Strauss. 2001. "Toward World Parliament," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 1, January/February.

[5] Mathews, Jessica T. 1997. "Power Shift." *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 76, No. 1, pp. 50–66. Three excellent examples of effective coalitions of like-minded states and nonstate actors aimed at precipitating reforms over the past several decades involved the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the Coalition for the International Criminal Court and the adoption of Responsibility to Protect doctrine as a global norm. Civil society groups also played a central role in the establishment of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative among very many other initiatives.

[6] Commission on Global Governance. 1995. *Our Global Neighbourhood: Report of the Commission on Global Governance.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, Chapter 4.

ECOSOC and other UN bodies/initiatives. Falk and Strauss did not provide specific proposals on how to go about electing the members of this Chamber and how membership would be distributed across thematic areas. But there are currently some 5,000 NGOs with consultative status at ECOSOC and it should not be an insurmountable problem to come up with criteria that might allow choices to be made to elect some 700–800 members to cover a representative spectrum of issues of global concern. For the 2000 NGO Forum the UN invited two groups of NGO representatives: Those from organizations with consultative status with ECOSOC, and those accredited to thematic UN conferences during the 1990s. However, NGO representatives to the Chamber could also be selected by alternative criteria, including possibly by a representative, independent international expert appointment committee, and/or some form of popular vote where such elections could take place freely, without government interference, while also ensuring broad thematic representation.

Such an initiative could begin as a Forum, meeting regularly, and would recognize that solutions to some of our most critical problems require multistakeholder engagement. Over time, it could facilitate the emergence of a Chamber of Civil Society which would also play a central advisory role with respect to the General Assembly.

ADDRESSING GLOBAL CATASTROPHIC RISKS

The ultimate goal of this dimension of UN reform will be to arrive at an effective decision-making capacity to address global challenges, able to enforce binding policies and legislation necessary to control and hopefully avert them. Such reforms will need sufficient legitimacy to be able to build wide public support for the Chamber's proposals and decisions, which will need to place the global interest above the particular interests of powerful governments, businesses, and economic actors which may resist such changes in the collective public interest. While it will take time to reach this stage of maturity in global governance, much can be done to prepare the foundations for an effective legislative process.

A Chamber of Civil Society would be one arena for creative and constructive debate to build consensus across a wide range of stakeholders. A number of additional supporting mechanisms will be necessary to support this process, many of which can be created without waiting for reformed mechanisms to be fully in place, and which could even hasten the process. The preparation of reforms and other initiatives in the area of international cooperation requires steps of investigation, exploration of alternatives, consultation with stakeholders, and the preparation of documents capturing the emerging consensus, before it is debated in a decision-making setting. Even when binding understandings are not yet possible, the precise definition of problems and risks can help to push voluntary action by governments and other actors. Advisory bodies would be made up of individuals

chosen primarily on the basis of professional credentials and a credible track record of expertise. They could initially mainly focus their efforts and attention on a small set of pressing global catastrophic risks, including climate change and the whole range of issues associated with the deterioration of the environment, nuclear proliferation, and the peace and security challenges this raises, as well as the broader set of economic development problems stemming from poverty and worsening trends in income distribution.

There is an excellent precedent for such an approach in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), created in 1988 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) to prepare an agreed scientific basis for actions to address climate change. Its early reports helped to provide the impetus for the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) signed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and subsequent reports built the momentum for the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015. Its experts are nominated by all the world's governments but participate in their independent capacities as experts. They review all the relevant scientific literature, assess it through open peer-reviewed processes, and their summary conclusions are reviewed and endorsed by all member governments, seeking to ensure that their conclusions represent the consensus on the best science available, as illustrated by their most recent special report.[7]

In the scientific domain beyond the most urgent, global catastrophic risks, the General Assembly would also need a number of general supporting advisory mechanisms to provide additional specialized scientific, technical, and other expertise. For example, a broad scientific advisory process would be required to provide authoritative reports on the state of the planet, building on more specific advisory bodies such as the existing IPCC, and the comparable Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). For climate change, for example, it will be necessary to determine the planetary limits for greenhouse gas concentrations as the basis for negotiations on the allocations for each country to respect those limits, as only objective science can provide a sufficient basis for the difficult sharing of responsibilities to return within those limits. Similar scientific assessment processes will be needed for other global risks, such as global pollution risks from chemicals and nuclear radiation, the management of plastics and other persistent wastes, the need to remain within other planetary environmental boundaries such as for biogeochemical cycles, and the management and equitable distribution of the planet's natural resources and sources of energy. Global dimensions of land use, freshwater supplies, the atmosphere and the oceans will eventually need to be covered. This will require groups of experts of the greatest knowledge and confidence, similar to those making up the IPCC, in all the relevant

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[7]   IPCC. 2018. *Global Warming of 1.5°C* (SR15), Special Report. Summary for Policy Makers. Geneva, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, October. www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/.

domains, to ensure that decisions are taken and revised as necessary based on the best information available. Such groups could be established for each global domain or risk identified.

A similar advisory process for the risks of new technologies in an Office of Technology Assessment will be needed to prepare reports on emerging or problematic technologies that may require global legislative action, such as geoengineering,[8] genetic modifications and new creations, nanotechnologies, access to and security of information and communications technologies, the damaging manipulation of public opinion, and uses of artificial intelligence, among others. The combination of information technologies and biotechnologies with artificial intelligence risks marginalizing masses of people and making their jobs irrelevant, while collecting more information about entire populations, making them passive consumers easily manipulated and controlled. The whole process of governance could be transformed, undermining democracies and fostering dictatorships by making extreme centralization possible; yet the development of these technologies is largely in the private sector beyond any regulation or control.[9] Proper assessment of the risks would support the necessary global legislation to regulate the handling and ownership of data and ensure that technological developments support rather than undermine the common interest.

Even social and economic challenges can present global risks that need to be assessed objectively, far from partisan or ideological considerations, such as the impacts of and solutions to extreme economic inequalities (Chapter 14), or the protection of and assistance to migrants and displaced persons whose numbers will increase dramatically if climate change and resource destruction are not brought rapidly under control (Chapter 17). The inequalities that continue to drive excessive rates of population growth beyond what resources can support need to be addressed so that the human population can be brought naturally back into balance with the carrying capacity of the planet. Authoritative reports on these issues could help to build concerted global action to reduce the risks.

An ethical advisory process in an Office of Ethical Assessment would also be useful to remind decision-makers of the fundamental values and ethical principles accepted by all governments in the various international resolutions, statements, and authoritative reports, and to provide insights on the ethical implications of issues under consideration, such as impacts on the overall security situation, broadly defined, on human rights and on future generations.

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[8] This gap in governance has recently been highlighted by the Brookings Institution for geoengineering and gene drive technologies in West, Darrell M. and Jack Karsten. 2017. *Solutions for Global Science Issues Require New Forms of Governance*. Brookings Institution blog, May 4. www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2017/05/04/solutions-for-global-science-issues-require-new-forms-of-governance.

[9] Harari, Yuval Noah. 2018. "Why Technology Favors Tyranny." *The Atlantic*, October. www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/yuval-noah-harari-technology-tyranny/568330/.

One cannot overestimate the impact that a global consultative process operating on the basis of scientific evidence and driven by considerations of the public global interest (rather than allegiance to narrower priorities, which is often the subtext to discussions motivated by national sovereignty) would have in changing the current dynamic of large-scale inertia on the part of governments to rise to confront the critical problems that we face. A WPA and/or Chamber of Civil Society would establish a direct connection between the UN system and the global citizenry, which at the moment either does not exist or is too weak to make a reliable difference. Having a larger measure of democratic legitimacy, its deliberations and recommendations would be imbued with a degree of credibility and urgency that existing organs such as the Security Council and the General Assembly have lacked, at great cost to global welfare and our collective future. This could thus become a powerful catalyst for actual change across the global governance system.

ENHANCING UN LEGISLATIVE CAPACITY TO CONSOLIDATE GLOBAL SOLIDARITY AND COMMUNITY

In his persuasive case for the establishment of a WPA, Dieter Heinrich sees this body as a powerful catalyst to enhance the quality of the debate about the nature of international cooperation and the extent to which our current global order still serves the interests of humanity. An excessively state-centric ideology, which dominated the debates that took place in the period leading to the founding of the United Nations and that have dragged on since 1945, is not only inherently anarchic but is no longer a reliable basis to confront and to manage the problems that assail the world. In his view, the fundamental question that we need to ask is: Is the world a community of peoples or a collection of sovereign states? And is the only way to serve effectively the interests of citizens – and national communities themselves – in an increasingly interdependent world exclusively through the actions of national governments? The answer to this question is clearly no; this has been reflected in the growing recognition that there are global interests that transcend national borders, and that governments are increasingly impotent to deal with a range of problems that straddle national borders. The state-centric predilections that have underpinned our global order in recent decades can be seen as anti-democratic as they fail to recognize that, ultimately, sovereignty vests in the people – in this case, the global citizenry – rather than in the states that properly should be vehicles of the public trust, committed also to solving international problems.

On the occasion of the 2000 Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in Prague, Vaclav Havel, the then president of the Czech Republic and one of Europe's most enlightened political leaders, said that the time had come "to address another restructuring, concerning the system of values on which contemporary civilization rests." In practice this would mean adopting a system of values that is consistent with the emergence of a rapidly integrating and interdependent

community of nations. Havel's vision of humanity desperately in need of a new concept of global order finds resonance in the writings of anthropologists, for many of whom the notion of "the psychic unity of mankind" is nothing new. George Murdock claimed that "all peoples now living or of whom we possess substantial historical records, irrespective of differences in geography and physique, are essentially alike in their basic psychological equipment and mechanism, and the cultural differences between them reflect only the differential responses of essentially similar organisms to unlike stimuli or conditions."[10] And Craig Venter, one of the scientists who led the effort to map the human genome, declared that "there is only one race – the human race,"and that if one asks what percentage of our genes is reflected in our external appearance, the basis by which we talk about race, the answer seems to be in the range of 0.01 percent.[11]

It may yet be many years before the generality of humankind becomes conscious of the *scientific* basis of its "oneness," but it is not too early to cultivate the values of shared human identity. We need to develop broader loyalties that correspond to our newly acquired psychic unity. For the benefits of globalization to be fully realized, we need to acquire a sense of solidarity that extends to the whole human family, not just the members of our own particular tribe. Many philosophies and faith traditions have principles that will support the development of this vision. Pope Francis has written: "There has been a growing conviction that our planet is a homeland and that humanity is one people living in a common home … . Interdependence obliges us to think of *one world with a common plan* [original emphasis]."[12] A central principle of the Baháʼí Faith is that "the earth is but one country and mankind its citizens."[13] The English mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell spoke of the need to "expand our mental universe" to match the increasingly global vision provided by scientific advancement and discovery. He said that our sense of collective well-being would have to extend to the whole of humanity as it was evident that human society was increasingly behaving as a single organic entity. These observations, made well over half a century ago, are self-evident in the age of globalization. Strengthened supporting mechanisms such as a WPA and a Civil Society Chamber would be a powerful symbol that national borders are, when it comes to our shared global challenges and shared human identity, contingent, that they have contributed to overemphasizing ultimately superficial and artificial distinctions, and that "world citizenship" may in fact be a legitimate and meaningful concept, reflecting a gradually emerging set of broadly shared values. The

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[10] Murdock, George. 1965. *Culture and Society*. University of Pittsburg Press.
[11] Angier, Natalie. 2000. "DNA Research Shows Race Is Only Skin Deep." *The International Herald Tribune*, August 24.
[12] Pope Francis. 2015. *Laudato Siʼ: On Care for Our Common Home*, §164.
[13] Baháʼuʼlláh. 1990. *Gleanings from the Writings of Baháʼuʼlláh*. US Baháʼí Publishing Trust, p. 346.

establishment of these broader solidarities, incarnated in novel international bodies with greatly enhanced effectiveness as described, would be a signal step not only in imbuing the United Nations with a healthier dose of democratic legitimacy than it currently has, but it would also strengthen the architecture of global governance to tangibly improve the lives of all the peoples of the world.